

WELS NEWS

April 2015

Synodical Council approves Ministry Financial Plan

The Synodical Council (SC) held its winter meeting last week. The foremost item on the agenda was the adoption of the 2015-2017 biennium Ministry Financial Plan (budget) to be recommended to the synod convention for consideration this summer.

Prior to adopting the plan, the SC received word that the Church Extension Fund (CEF) will be making grants of \$700,000 to Home Missions in each of the next two years. In addition, the WELS Foundation also forwarded a grant of \$460,000 to the synod this year and is planning grants of \$150,000 annually during the biennium. Both of these grants to the synod resulted from newly adopted policies governing the unrestricted net assets of the WELS Foundation.

As a part of the planning process the SC first adopted the Support Forecast, which estimates the anticipated financial support available for the synod's mission and ministry. On the basis of that information, the SC then established spending levels for all areas of ministry in a Ministry Financial Plan that includes the following features:

- The operating support total of \$29,426,700 for the first year is virtually unchanged from the current operating support of \$29,410,800.
- The operating support total for the second year of the biennium drops to \$27,890,800, since the anticipated retirement of the synod's capital debt will no longer require the \$1,600,000 allocation for debt repayment.
- Total expenditures (which include synod support and special funds) increase by \$1.2 million in the first year, with the majority of that increase in Home Missions, made possible by the use of additional special funds already on hand and the grant from the CEF.
- Even though the synod support levels have been kept flat, the overall plan provides sufficient support for our Ministerial Education schools and for all existing World Mission fields and expanded work in Home Missions.
- Home Missions receives an additional allocation of \$700,000 in both years of the biennium as a result of the grant from the Church Extension Fund. This will enable it to plant several additional new home missions.

The Support Forecast assumes a 1% increase in CMO in each year of the biennium. Increases greater than that will either enable some unfunded items to be funded or will result in a smaller drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund.

While the decrease in Congregation Mission Offering subscriptions for 2015 presented some challenges, the SC earlier made reductions of \$825,000 in the current year plan to enable the synod to operate within expected levels of support. Additional steps taken in forming the 2015-2017 plan are also intended to keep the synod's expenditures within the planned levels of support. The complete plan will be published in the *Book of Reports and Memorials*.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder

New Multi-Language Publications Coordinator

Rev. Nathan Seiltz has accepted the call to serve as coordinator of WELS Multi-Language Publications. Seiltz will replace Rev. Paul Hartman, who is retiring after serving in this position for 14 years as well as 10 years as director of publications for Latin America missions before that.

Multi-Language Publications (MLP) assists in the production of confessional Christian literature and other mass media in more than 45 different languages. Increasingly, MLP produces digital publications in addition to print publications.

Mr. Sean Young, director of Missions Operations, says, "Paul Hartman's dedication and perseverance have helped MLP grow into what it is today. From the very beginning, Paul has nurtured and grown the portfolio of offerings within MLP and has worked tirelessly to ensure that the synod's 'hidden jewel' gets uncovered and shared with everyone looking for solid material sharing the saving message."

Seiltz will be charged with continuing Hartman's work. A 1994 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., Seiltz is currently serving as principal at Evergreen Lutheran High School in Tacoma, Wash. His past service includes time as a world missionary in the Dominican Republic. In July 2014, he became chairman of the Europe Administrative Committee of the Board for World Missions.

As Seiltz transitions to his new role, the office of the MLP coordinator will move from El Paso, Tex., where much of MLP's work is currently performed, to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of the WELS Board for World Missions, explains that having the MLP coordinator near other WELS resources that can support and strengthen the reach of its materials will be "a welcome connection." Connecting with the missionaries and national workers who travel to the Center for Mission and Ministry will also now be easier.

As Schlomer notes, "It is time to make sure WELS sees and uses this gem.

The treasure of materials, the experience of production, and the help of many brothers and sisters in many cultures is the strength MLP brings to WELS efforts to reach the lost in the world.”

Learn more about Multi-Language Publications at www.wels.net/mlp.

Representatives From The CLC, ELS, And WELS Meet

On Jan. 30, representatives from the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and WELS met for doctrinal discussions at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis. This was the first meeting between representatives of these three synods since 1990. It was called by the synod presidents, with the encouragement of the appropriate synod committees, upon the request of a grassroots group of pastors from all three synods in the Mankato, Minn., area.

The meeting was cordial and productive. The participants shared perspectives on the history of the relationship between the three synods. The participants also discussed the “Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship Between Church Bodies,” a document that was prepared in 1990 during the last round of doctrinal discussions. A reconciliation is not expected to come about easily or quickly between the CLC and ELS/WELS. But attendees found it was useful to hear first-hand how the situation looks from the perspective of others and to discuss what it would take to overcome the breach that has separated the synods.

Representing the CLC were Pres. Michael Eichstadt, Rev. Paul Nolting, and Rev. Bruce Naumann; representing the ELS were Pres. John Moldstad, Prof. Gaylin Schmeling, and Prof. Erling Teigen; and representing WELS were Prof. John Brenner, Prof. Thomas Nass, and Pres. Mark Schroeder. Only one of these participants was involved in the 1990 meetings, so this meeting brought together a new generation of leaders who have not discussed the issues together before.

A second meeting is planned for April 17 in Eau Claire, Wis., to continue the discussions. The second meeting will focus more pointedly on the “Joint Statement” of 1990 and will begin the discussion of additional topics of concern.

New Spanish-Language Website

In an effort to get the gospel into the homes of more families in Latin America, a new Spanish-language website, Academia Cristo (Christ Academy), has been developed to provide further outreach and training opportunities.

"We have an opportunity to communicate the gospel in Latin America

like we've never had before," says Missionary Michael Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America, referring to the statistic that there will be 70 million smartphone users in Mexico by the end of 2015. "People are getting on the Internet, and they're getting on with their mobile phones."

Whereas Spanish-language printed materials developed by Multi-Language Publications (MLP) had been used in the past, the goal is to replace this written material with videos and audio Bible studies that can be distributed more widely through the Internet. Hartman says this will be appealing to Latinos, who don't have a reading culture but are regularly on their smartphones.

While there will be simple courses available for non-Christians, the point of the site isn't strictly outreach. "Gospel outreach happens when you sit down and you talk with your friends or family about Jesus," says Hartman. "What we really want to do is enable Christians to be able to do just that."

For that purpose, Academia Cristo will also include a level of courses for local leaders that will show them how to share their faith. A future goal is to add seminary courses for those training for the ministry.

Hartman, the Latin American national churches, and other members of the mission team are working closely with MLP to create the courses. Currently six courses are completed, including two five-lesson Bible studies based on the *Come Follow Me* movie as well as other courses on what Christians believe and who Jesus is.

World Missions sees this site as a way to help serve scattered members throughout Latin America, providing ways for them to grow in the faith as well as share their faith with others.

With more and more Hispanics moving into the United States and connecting with WELS churches there, the site also offers a way for those far away from their homeland to share the gospel message they discovered.

This is not to take away the human element. A missionary or a national pastor is connected to each course, available to answer questions and concerns. Two members of the Latin American mission team also work directly with national church bodies and their members to explore new opportunities for outreach and training. One lives in Mexico; the other works with Hispanic members throughout the United States.

Check out the new site at www.academiacristo.com.